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ABSTRACT

Foreign language programs in America have not tried to meet the specific needs of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in professional schools who are preparing for an international career in law, marketing, accounting, hotel management, or engineering. These students need to be able to use the language in the performance of their professional duties. For them a foreign language is an auxiliary skill that allows them to do their job in the foreign country efficiently. Since most of these professionals stay in the foreign country for extended periods, they must be able to speak the foreign tongue with some fluency, must know enough about the foreign culture to integrate smoothly into the social environment and, most important, must have mastered the professional vocabulary they need to carry on their business. The proposed twelve-months, semi-intensive program achieves these goals through a combination of well tested and innovative methods in language instruction. These include a modular approach to the teaching of social-linguistic situations, culture, and the basic vocabulary essential to each student's professional area. A vital component of the program is an eight-to-twelve week practicum in the student's professional field in the target language country. (Author)

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CAREER EDUCATION AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL:

A MODEST PROPOSAL

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CAREER EDUCATION AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL:

A MODEST PROPOSAL[1]

I

Much has been written and said in recent years about the link between career education and foreign languages. Most of the comments and proposals were addressed to high school teachers, because in their schools the framework for career education already exists. The time has come for us, at the college level, also to concern ourselves seriously with this added dimension of foreign language education.

Most of us seem to have shied away from squarely facing the issues involved, perhaps because our attitude as teachers of the humanities has conditioned us to consider the teaching of foreign languages for the pragmatic usage implied in a career field somehow degrading and a corruption of our profession. Nothing could be further from the truth. In our proclaimed attempt to be both scholarly and humanitarian we ignore too often the obvious opportunity to lend a humanizing influence to the sciences, the business professions, and future government bureaucrats. Furthermore, we tend to forget that American education has traditionally been pragmatic education. There is nothing wrong with that, because the importance of knowledge lies in the use we make of it. To paraphrase a statement of Alfred North Whitehead in The Aims of Education, educational institutions should turn out students with something they know well, and something they can do well.[2]

Two sensible questions may be asked at this juncture. 1) Does the need for career education in the college foreign language department really

exist? 2) If it does, should we abandon or curtail our existing programs in favor of career education programs?

The second question is the easier one, so let me answer it first. No, we should not abandon or curtail our existing foreign language programs. The four traditionally-taught areas--linguistics, literature, Landeskunde, and pedagogy--must remain strong. We must continue to teach them for those students, majors and others, whose interests and needs they serve. But foreign language career education, that is foreign language as an auxiliary skill, must be developed as an additional, fifth, area to be taught to some of our college students.

That brings me back to my first question: does the need for career education in the college foreign language department really exist? The answer is: Yes. Let me explain.

For some time now I have been particularly troubled by comments from students enrolled in a professional school degree program who are taking a foreign language course. At the end of a year of study these students often feel that there is little relationship between the language course content and the particular profession in which they hope to apply their new skills. Specifically, what does the future junior executive of IBM, General Motors, or Exxon, who has ambitions of working for the firm in a foreign country, learn in the average first and second year college course in either French or German that would enable him to perform his work more effectively in the foreign country? The answer is: very little. He has learned and relearned the grammar system of the respective foreign language; he has learned also how to pronounce the foreign tongue without too much of an American accent; and he has acquired in the process, at best, a vocabulary consisting of 1,000 to 1,500 words after one year of study, and approximately 3,000 words after two years of study, which will enable him to engage in small talk,

buy a loaf of bread and some wine and cheese to go with it, rent a room in a hotel, ask for directions, order a meal, and possibly even talk about something as challenging as Sartre's Huis Clos or as puzzling as Kafka's parable "Vor dem Gesetz". If he has been exposed to culture-oriented teachers, he may in addition have a smattering of knowledge about French or German geography, history, politics, music, and art, with a sufficiently large active vocabulary to carry on simple conversations about these matters. But here, for all practical purposes, his communicative ability ends. To do his job more efficiently, to communicate with his colleagues and associates more effectively, and to share with them more easily the professional knowledge he has accumulated in his years of study, for these tasks his French or German studies have not equipped him adequately.

Measured by the Absolute Proficiency Rating Scale of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), U. S. Department of State, American college students normally attain the survival level (Level 1) of foreign language proficiency after two years of foreign langauge study.[3] However, they need to reach the FSI minimum professional level (Level 3) in order to perform satisfactorily for their employer in the jobs they have been educated for--and they need to reach that level of foreign language proficiency during the four to six years they are studying on our campuses.

Let me illustrate the foreign language problems of American college graduates with three examples taken from the world of business. During the past ten years many American business firms have found it increasingly difficult to sell their products overseas. While many complex factors are responsible for this situation, a major one is the tremendous technological progress European and Asian countries have achieved during the past decade. Ironically, as a result of America having shared its wealth and technical

know-how with the people of other nations, American businessmen abroad have seen their competitive advantage slip gradually, as young, well-trained, and vigorous competitors from Europe and Asia have entered the international market place. Many of the new competitors, especially those from Europe, are often more successful than their American counterparts, even when quality, price, and other factors are equal. One of the reasons for this situation is easy to comprehend: it is more convenient for the prospective customer to deal with a seller directly, in his own language, rather than through an interpreter. These young, knowledgable European and Asian businessmen speak several foreign languages fluently; they are at ease in the cultural setting of the country of their prospective customers; they are socially able to integrate smoothly in the new language community; and they possess a sufficiently broad professional vocabulary to conduct their business meetings in the language of their prospective customers. In the world of international business, these are four assets which the American businessman frequently lacks; often, therefore, when all other things are equal, the American businessman is placed at a disadvantage. If he speaks a foreign language at all, his proficiency in it is generally at, or below, the survival level (FSI Level 1).[4]

A similar problem exists in American multi-national corporations, who would prefer to staff key personnel positions with intelligent, professionally well-trained Americans if possible. Too often, however, these Americans' knowledge of the foreign language and culture in which they are to communicate, live, work, and socially interact with the natives is the result of only a crash program at the Berlitz School or a similar company-operated language program. The results are too well known to need elaboration; they have often produced such costly consequences that Coca-Cola Japan, for instance, now

refuses to hire any American for a management position. Experience has shown them that, although Americans are well trained professionally, they are too often unable to handle the language at a minimum professional proficiency level and are equally unable to integrate socially into Japanese society. Any executive of a multi-national corporation is able to cite numerous other instances to illustrate this point.

Since United States corporation affiliates abroad numbered more than 30,000 in 1974, and United States private long-term overseas investment in the same year totalled $118 billion, with the largest portion ($44.5 billion) going to Europe, followed by Canada, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, it seems prudent to protect that investment by insuring that American business executives, corporation lawyers, accountants, and engineers reach a minimum professional foreign language proficiency level before they arrive at their overseas post.[5]

There is a third area in which the general monolinguistic handicap of American graduates from professional schools emerges. The number of foreign corporations operating plants in this country is constantly growing and represents a sizable investment. In 1974, for example, investment from Europe exceeded $16 billion, from Asia $113 million, and from the Middle East $1.7 billion.[6] These foreign corporations need a well-trained multilingual staff at the mid-management level. They are not looking for language majors, but for capable graduates of professional schools (business administration, hotel management, law, engineering, and medicine) who, in addition to their professional qualifications, possess sufficient foreign language skills to communicate effectively with the frequently non-American senior staff and the home office.

Obviously, as the above examples show, foreign language skills are vitally important in a number of professional occupations, not as primary but as secondary skills. Consequently, our profession needs to develop a program in all modern foreign languages that will equip internationally oriented students from the professional schools--in accounting, marketing, engineering, law, medicine, hotel administration, and travel/tourism--with the degree and kind of foreign language skills they need to live and carry on their business in a foreign country. Two or three years of traditional college foreign language study do not accomplish that goal.

Let me propose, therefore, a comprehensive, basic, twelve months, semi-intensive foreign language program, designed to achieve minimum professional proficiency for those students of professional schools who plan to embark upon an international career. The program could serve as a model for similar programs to be developed by others as needs and the availability of resources dictate.

II

The pilot program I propose is to be developed in German, and will be specifically directed towards students of hotel management and business administration, since these two professions seem to feel the need for language proficiency most urgently.

The twelve months, semi-intensive course is divided into three segments. During the first segment, which lasts one semester, the focus is almost exclusively on language, except for twelve situational and resource modules to be described later. At the end of this segment, the student will have an active knowledge of German pronunciation; will be able to use the basic,

most frequent structures of the German language; and will be able to manage successfully, at the elementary level of oral proficiency, twelve high-frequency basic social situations.

During the second segment, again one semester long, basic language instruction continues for sixty per cent of the semester. This segment's primary focus, however, is on German culture and the particular professional field of the student. At the end of this semester, the student will be thoroughly familiar with the German language system and be able to use its most frequent structures correctly and with relative ease; he will have a general knowledge of German culture and a sufficiently large active vocabulary to converse in simple language with educated speakers on cultural, political, and social topics. Furthermore, his specialized professional vocabulary will be ample enough for him to communicate effectively in numerous routine situations with colleagues, subordinates, and superiors in each major area of his professional field.

The final segment of the program is a practicum in a German-speaking country, which has as objective the strengthening and deepening of the student's knowledge and skills in German language and culture, reinforced by their application to his own professional field. Each student will be placed with a local firm in a job related to his profession for a period ranging from eight to twelve weeks. Each student will be expected to perform regularly the duties assigned to him by his employer; he will not be considered a visitor or an observer, but be an active participant in the daily routine of the business. For this brief period the student will be treated as a regular employee of the firm and be paid for his services commensurate with his duties. The student will live with a German-speaking family,

preferably one which does not know any English, and will be expected to pay for his room and board.

To achieve the stated goals of the program within twelve months, special instructional materials must be developed. These include five sets of texts, workbooks, and taped materials. A grammar text, used both semesters, focuses on the basic structure of the language. The core of each chapter is a grammar analysis section, based on comparative linguistic principles. This section is followed by a sequence of pattern drills that use a minimum of high frequency vocabulary and focus on the structures discussed in the analysis section. The accompanying workbook, which makes use of the same basic vocabulary as the grammar text, is to be used for additional oral and written practice. A casette tape program, supplementing the grammar text and the workbook, provides the student with additional out-of-class practice.

The second text, used only during the first semester, contains twelve resource modules that the student needs to study in preparation for using the twelve taped situational modules. The text provides a literal transcription of the resource-module tapes and offers suggestions on how the material may be used in conversational situations. The accompanying workbook requires the student to complete in writing brief conversational exchanges in preparation for similar oral exercises he will be required to complete when working with the taped situational modules.

These situation modules are contained in the third first-semester text, which consists of three parts. Section A develops reading comprehension. The student is required to read a brief text which sets the general scene for the accompanying listening comprehension exercise recorded on the situation-module tape. The text on the tape utilizes the vocabulary of the resource-module tape and the grammatical structures of the grammar text. However,

no transcription of the taped material is available to the student. Section B requires the student to listen to a different situation-module tape and to answer brief written questions about the content of what he has heard. Section C again develops reading comprehension by providing the student with the setting of a new situation, which he and a fellow student are then required to act out in class or to record on tape for purposes of practice and evaluation.

Appendices I - III (pp. 15-17) elaborate somewhat on the content of the three texts I have described so far. The interlocking system of research and situation modules (texts two and three) is based on the modular approach to language instruction developed by the Chinese Section of the Foreign Service Institute. It is currently in use by that agency in its Standard Chinese program.

The fourth text will be used only during the second semester; it presents information about German culture, develops reading comprehension, and expands the student's store of passive vocabulary. The first three of its ten units provide a thumbnail sketch of basic German geography, history, economics, politics, the fine arts, and literature. The following seven units are arranged around topical clusters, focusing primarily on the past 200 years of German culture, with a strong emphasis on developments in post-war Germany (East and West), Austria and Switzerland.[7]

The final text, also used only during the second semester, is the professional text. A separate version of this text is developed for each of the professional fields. Each text contains reading, writing, listening, and speaking exercises utilizing high frequency professional vocabulary from each of several major areas of the professional field. The accompanying workbook is supplemented by a dictionary of the most frequently used words, phrases, and expressions common to the particular professional field.

Texts four and five are supplemented in class with additional audio-visual materials (tapes, slides, films, and overhead projections) to reinforce particular items of vocabulary in appropriate cultural or professional settings.

III

The course I have described does not fit easily into the traditional foreign language program structure of three to four class meetings per week, but requires a structure of its own. The following suggested structure provides for the minimum contact hours essential for reaching the objectives of the course.

Since the grammar, resource, situation, and culture modules are taught from texts used in common by all students, these subjects are introduced in twice-a-week lecture-work sessions to a random mix of no more than forty students per class. These subjects are subsequently drilled in detail in daily sessions in which the students are separated by their profession. Each drill session contains no more than ten students, in order to assure high frequency interaction between student and teacher and between student and student. The professional text and materials are used exclusively in the drill sessions.

This lecture-drill system provides for seven contact hours per week, 98 per semester, or 196 per academic year. By comparison, the average foreign language program in which the student meets four hours per week results in 112 contact hours per academic year. The semi-intensive program I suggest thus provides for 75% more contact hours within the same span of time. Students enrolled in the program are awarded six hours of college credit per semester, plus four or five hours of college credit for the practicum in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland, depending on their length of stay.

An essential part of any educational program is the method of evaluation it employs. Throughout this course, student achievement will be measured by a combination of internally created, conventional written tests of the discrete point and integrated variety, and mini oral proficiency tests, used at the conclusion of each situational and professional module. At the end of the second semester an external national achievement test, the College Entrance Examination Board Test (CEEB), will be used to measure the students' listening and reading comprehension. This test, which measures receptive, not productive, skills, will allow comparison between the performance of students enrolled in this program and other first year German students throughout the country. The test will be administered a second time, when each student has returned from his practicum overseas, to measure the effect of his stay in the target language country.

Since the CEEB exam provides only minimal and indirect data on a student's communicative proficiency, we shall add a second test upon the student's return from overseas. This is the Oral Interview Test, developed by the FSI. Since its inception in 1956 this test has undergone numerous changes, and is used by the United States government to measure the linguistic proficiency of its career diplomats and foreign service personnel for the purpose of overseas assignment and promotion. This type of test, in spite of its inherent subjectivity, is still the most objective oral proficiency test in existence. The focus of the test is on active, productive language competence; and its inherent flexibility allows it to be directed towards any given subject matter of a professional, cultural, or social nature. It is therefore extremely suitable as an evaluative tool for the type of program I have outlined here.

The oral proficiency test will be administered to the students by one or more outside teams, each consisting of a linguist competent in German and a native speaker of German. Linguist and native speaker will be either current or recent past employees of the FSI.

Through the student evaluation process, particularly the CEEB test and the use of outside examiners of student oral proficiency, the program itself will be evaluated.

The development, teaching, and evaluation of the program I have described will take three years, at an annual cost of about $105,000. Looking at it from a different perspective, the annual cost of the Pilot Project will be slightly more than $5 per student potentially affected by it.[8] The cost, therefore, is low, especially when we consider both the flexibility of the program which, once developed, is easily adaptable to any other modern language, and the broad clientele it can serve. In order not to drain the resources of any single institution, the program could be financed by a combination of federal funds and a consortium of colleges and universities.

There it is: a modest proposal that makes an honest effort to solve a specific problem. It is time we face this problem since, by conservative estimates, it affects more than 20,000 college graduates annually. It is time we provide for these students in the professional schools the foreign language education that fits intelligently into their overall academic program.

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NOTES

[1] This is a slightly expanded version of a paper presented in August 1976 at the 44th Annual Meeting of the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) in Philadelphia, U.S.A.

[2] Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education, New York: MacMillan Company, 1929, 1967, p. 74.

[3] Cf. Allen I. Weinstein, "Foreign Language Majors: The Washington Perspective," ADFL-Bulletin (May '75), pp. 18-27; John B. Carroll, Foreign Language Attainments of Language Majors in the Senior Year: A Survey Conducted in U. S. Colleges and Universities, Cambridge, Mass.: 1967, pp. 10 ff., 43; John B. Carroll, "Foreign Language Proficiency Levels Attained by Language Majors Near Graduation from College," Foreign Language Annals (Dec. '67), pp. 131-51.

[4] Cf. Weinstein, pp. 22-23.

[5] U. S. Department of Commerce: Survey of Current Business - 1974, Volume 56, No. 5 (May '76), p. 328.

[6] Ibid., p. 38.

[7] A separate workbook will accompany the culture text. Its purpose is to check the student's reading comprehension by asking him a series of brief questions in German, which he will answer in English. The taped portion of the culture component contains ten units that complement the subject matter

of each unit in the text. Its goal is to develop listening comprehension. No transcript of the tapes is available to the student, who is required to take brief notes on what he hears.

[8] The cost-per-student figure is based on the following information. In 1974, 52,016 bachelor and master degrees were conferred in the U.S. in business administration, 66,078 in engineering, 33,380 in political science, 33,675 in law (27,205 LL.B. or J.D.), 16,573 in economics, and 1,252 in hotel management. If only ten per cent of the total (202,974) had left college with a minimum professional proficiency in at least one foreign language, they would have been better equipped to perform successfully in the jobs for which they had prepared themselves. Source for statistical data: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare: Earned Degrees Conferred, 1973-1974, Washington, D.C.: HEW, U.S. Government, 1975.

APPENDIX I

FIRST SEMESTER: GRAMMAR TEXT

Schedule

Week	Major Topics to Be Covered
1	Present tense: regular and some irregular verbs; gender; plurals; basic sentence structure.
2 & 3	Nominative and accusative cases; ein- /der- words; verbal complements; coordinating conjunctions.
4 & 5	Modal verbs; imperative; negation.
6 & 7	Dative case; present perfect tense; time phrases.
8	Narrative past; infinitive constructions; open conditions.
9 & 10	Future tense; general subjunctive.
11 & 12	Doubtful prepositions; genetive case; special subjunctive.
13	Relative pronouns; da- /wo- compounds; prepositional objects.
14	Review.

APPENDIX II

FIRST SEMESTER: RESOURCE MODULES

Schedule

Week	Content
1	Phonology; numbers; greetings; names; simple introductions; days of week; months of year; common forms of address; social clichés.
2	Background; family; age; home town; education; professions.
3	Changing money; purchases; prices; costs; telling time; opening, closing times of things.
4	Making reservations for dinner; food items; 25 different foods and 6 different drinks to order in a restaurant for various meals.
5	None.
6	Asking/giving directions inside/outside a building (city, highway).
7	Getting a room (hotel, pension); getting services; buying newspapers, magazines, etc.
8	Telephone clichés; leaving a message with the operator/secretary.
9	Buying stamps; inquiring about the cost of postage; sending packages and telegrams inside the country, the continent, overseas.
10	None.
11	Getting people to restate things more simply; departure/arrival of bus, train, plane; planning/inquiring about a trip; getting a taxi and talking with the driver.
12	Service station: car breakdown; service/maintenance instructions; in need of help.
13	Being tired, hungry, thirsty, sick, in need of some personal comfort; describing medical needs to pharmacist, doctor, nurse, or some other person providing emergency care; asking for embassy, consulate, police.
14	Arranging meeting with someone: time, place, date; issuing a simple invitation (cigarette, drink, lunch, dinner, theater, concert, movie).

APPENDIX III

FIRST SEMESTER: SITUATION MODULES

Schedule

Week	Situation
1	Orientation
2	Biographical information
3	Money matters; time
4	Restaurant
5	None
6	Directions
7	Rentals and purchases: hotel/pension; newspaper, magazine, car
8	Telephone
9	Post office
10	None
11	Transportation; travel bureau
12	Car care
13	Personal welfare; emergencies
14	Invitations; arranging meetings